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FM REO BASRAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0495
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0101
INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0014
RUEHBC/REO BASRAH 0515

S E C R E T BASRAH 000003

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/5/2017
TAGS: ASEC CASC PTER MOPS PGOV I2
SUBJECT: AN AMERICAN KIDNAPPED IN BASRAH

REF: BASRAH 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Louis L. Bono, Director, REO Basrah, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (a), (b), (d)

1.(C) On January 4, U.S. citizen Ronald Withrow, his Iraqi driver and Iraqi bodyguard, departed Basrah for Baghdad in a POV. The three, employees of JPI Worldwide, were stopped at an Iraqi Police checkpoint in Amarah and taken to a local police station "because their paperwork was not in order." The Amarah police offered to escort Withrow to Basrah Air Station (BAS) on the evening of January 4, but were informed he spent the night in Amarah instead.

2.(SBU) The following morning, the Amarah police escorted the trio to Basrah, where they arranged to transfer them to Basrah police, who agreed to escort them to BAS. However, when they arrived at the Basrah city limits, the Basrah police were not there. Instead they were met by a crowd of people. Shortly thereafter, approximately seven vehicles carrying 14-armed males arrived and abducted Withrow and his Iraqi colleagues.

3.(S) Basrah Chief of Police Brigadier General Hamadi informed MND (SE) and us that this abduction was conducted by members of JAM and the recently disbanded serious crimes unit. (See reftel.) According to Hamadi, the group was led by Ahmed Abd Ali al-Battat the son of the (self-proclaimed) mayor of the Al Hartha Kadem al-Battat district of Basrah. Kadem had been apprehended by British forces about three weeks ago, and Hamadi suggested that Ahmed may be seeking an exchange. British military informed us that Hamadi has been advocating for Kadem's release since his arrest.

4.(C) Basrah Governor Al Wa'eli privately condemned the action and told us he also suspects Ahmed was behind the kidnapping. He told the MND (SE) "you should have taken (Kadem and Ahmed) out when you had the chance."

5.(S) In the meantime, British forces are planning an operation in the Hartha district early morning January 6. Based on today's events, they have increased the number of troops from 800 to 1250, and they hope that some of the individuals they are targeting will provide leads on Withrow.

6.(S) Comment: Today's events underscore our concerns about the security leaders in Basrah expressed in reftel. We have every reason to believe that Winthrow's abduction was prearranged by JAM factions, based on information leaked by Basrah police. It is possible that Hamadi had prior knowledge of the abduction; either way, it is clear that he was powerless to prevent it. End comment.

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